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**In 2018, about 3 million visits will be made across all 50 states.**

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A Letter from the President & CEO Annie Peters

Have you ever had one of those days when your life takes a delightfully unexpected turn? That’s what happened to me one rainy evening last October, thanks to longtime Pet Partners evaluator Jane Kopelman. I bet many readers will be able to identify with the life-changing experience I’m about to share.

I was at a Pet Partners event in New York City and wasn’t fully aware of Jane’s impressive credentials. Though I knew of her longtime commitment to Pet Partners and that she had evaluated hundreds of teams, I didn’t know that one of Jane’s many roles is the Owner/Director of the organization Animals for Adoption. We were chatting away, and I casually mentioned, “I’m ready for my next dog. I’m looking for a rescue, about 30 pounds, athletic enough to hike, but with the potential to one day be a registered therapy animal.” Jane replied, “I have just the dog for you.”

It was the face that launched a thousand dog-toy purchases. One cross-country plane ride later for an oh-so-brave pup, I spend my days trying to out-Gidget Gidget.

I’m hopeful we’ll grow together into a therapy animal team. You can’t give Gidget enough affection. We’re still getting to know each other and learning how to work as a team. In the meantime, I can personally attest to what researchers call “dog obligation.” Rain or shine (let’s be honest, it’s Seattle—mostly rain), Gidget and I are out walking. What would be one of our first therapy animal team activities? Walk with Me™! I’d love to post a flyer in our building: “Walk with Gidget, a Pet Partners® registered therapy animal, every Saturday morning at 9 a.m.”

Before Gidget and I head out, I’d like to again remind you that if you haven’t yet signed up to be an advocate, take a minute and do so at petpartners.org/advocacy/

When we launched our advocacy platform in 2017, we were hoping to lend our voice to seeing good legislation passed that contributes to human health and well-being as the result of the human-animal bond; but we had it in the back of our mind that one day legislation specific to therapy animal visitation might emerge, and we would want to be organized and ready to speak out to protect the wonderful work our volunteers do. We didn’t know that day would come so soon.

The day may come when we need you to speak up in your state! You don’t have to be a Therapy Animal Program volunteer to be an advocate. Recruit retired volunteers. Recruit people at the facilities where you visit. Recruit friends and family. You could even recruit people you meet when you’re out walking!

Gidget and I hope to “walk with you” for the World’s Largest Pet Walk on September 29!

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Pet Partners introduced Walk With Me, a new program initiative to encourage walking and movement, in September 2017. In less than six months, our teams have embraced this idea and are making use of this initiative in many ways to improve human health and well-being.

Helping Students through Walking

by Ruth Olsen

When I saw the announcement from Pet Partners about the new Walk with Me initiative, my creative juices got flowing. I like to think out of the box. As a Physical Therapist Assistant for over 30 years, I understand the need for movement and walking and the benefits it has for all ages. As a dog handler, I understand the benefit of volunteering with my dog and how that human-animal bond always amazes me.

I have been volunteering at Village Elementary in Georgetown, TX for four years as a Read With Me™ team. My partner Bella and I are part of the school not only working with students reading, but also teaching students about dog safety and helping students in stressful situations. But there seemed to be one population that I was unable to reach out to through these activities: students with special needs. Walk With Me offered a new opportunity to connect with those students. I approached the principal and school counselor about Walk With Me and offered to reach out to three students who they felt would benefit from this initiative.

I started walking with Angel, a first-grade student, and Lani and Roman, third-grade students, once a week. I attach a short two-foot leash to Bella for the student to hold on to while I continue to have control of Bella with my regular leash. After I complete my Read With Me program at the school, I pick up each Walk With Me student individually and take them for a 10-minute walk inside the school.

Our first walk with Angel was challenging. As he exited the classroom, I saw a small boy who made no eye contact, and was informed that he did not speak. His body posture was that of a child who was unable to reach out to others, shy and timid around people. I told him Bella’s name and asked if he would like to hold the leash. He did, using only his fingertips, and did not look at Bella. We walked and I chatted the entire time, telling him about Bella while giving Bella directions for turns, stay, sit, and other commands. At the end of our first walk I asked him if he wanted to pet Bella; he gave her a quick touch and returned to his classroom.

By the end of the fourth visit, Angel was running out of the class, grabbing the additional leash and smiling at Bella. He always gives her hugs, kisses, and treats at the start and end of the walk. During the walk, he looks at her and even pets her on occasion, and when I ask him a question he looks at me and nods yes or no. The staff soon noticed a difference in Angel on “Bella walk days”: He was happier. The staff is excited to see him walk with Bella as he always has a giant smile on his face, an expression that they normally do not see. Angel continues to be mostly non-verbal—except when he passes Bella in the hall. If Angel passes Bella and me in the hall I hear him say “That is Bella, my dog,” in a loud, clear voice.

One day, Angel was so excited to walk with Bella that he was almost running down the hall with us. I asked Angel to slow down, which he promptly did. Later that morning, as Bella and I were in the hall, Angel’s class was going to lunch. I watched as Angel weaved his way to the end of the class line and heard him say “Bella slow down, go slow” as he waved at her.
Bella has made a difference in this child's life. He is more outgoing and able to express himself in ways that he had not before.

Roman came to me talking and has not stopped. He does have a speech impediment, but it did not appear to stop him from talking. He walks and talks about animals with me, especially his two new cats. He loves to give Bella hugs, pets, and treats. The staff informed me that Roman normally does not speak with strangers due to his speech impediment; I guess Bella was never a stranger to him! Roman is proud when he leaves the class and has told other students he is walking Bella because he is “special.” Bella has taught Roman that dogs do not judge and can be great listeners and friends.

Lani is a talkative, outgoing little girl who just wants to be heard all the time—she has an opinion on everything. It’s difficult to get her to focus on a topic and allow conversations to flow from one person to another, and she tended to ignore Bella when we first started walking. Bella helps with Lani’s focus because Bella needs verbal cues and hand signals to negotiate her way down the halls crowded with students. I have Bella stop so Lani can give her verbal and hand commands to walk through the hallways. This is encouraging Lani to engage with the dog and learn that she can help Bella by focusing on Bella’s needs. Bella has taught Lani to slow down, be aware of her environment, and engage with others—even, and including, a dog.

I am currently working with the school staff to set up a Walk With Me day outside on the school track for all classes, pre-K through fifth grade. I hope to have about five dogs for each class to take a lap around the track for a healthy fun walk. Plans are just starting; the event will probably take place the end of the school year. I hope this will be a positive way to encourage the students to see walking as fun and rewarding, and I’m glad I can use Walk With Me to help improve the well-being of all these children.
Take Part in Walk With Me!

- Registered Pet Partners teams can sign up for Walk With Me any time—there’s no fee or additional requirements. New or renewing teams can select it in the Special Initiatives step in the online registration; current teams can request to be signed up any time at petpartners.org/about-us/contact-us/
- For ideas on incorporating Walk With Me into team visits, registered handlers can consult the Walk With Me manual in the Resource Library on the Pet Partners website, and the Letters to the Editor in the Fall 2017 issue of Interactions.
- Facilities and organizations interested in Walk With Me visits at their sites can post requests on the Pet Partners website, or take part in our Workplace Well-being program. Please see the Facility and Workplace Well-being pages at petpartners.org for more information.

Pet Partners and Walking for Health

In late 2016 I had the pleasure of representing Pet Partners at a symposium for veterinarians and physicians, Preventing Obesity in People and Pets: A One Health Approach. Pet Partners’ history is steeped in One Health, with the old triangle logo from our Delta Society days being a nod to the connection between humans, animals, and the environment.

One of the conference organizers was Dr. Gregg Takashima, a former Chair of the Board of Pet Partners. Dr. Takashima is an active member of the World Small Animal Veterinary Association and the CEO of the Animal Care Group of Lake Oswego in Oregon.

The concern about the impact of obesity in America is everywhere. What role can the human-animal bond play? It’s actually a good news story. Dr. Takashima notes that obesity has been associated with depression and lower self-esteem, both of which are lessened with positive interactions with animals. As is also reported in the research article in this issue, individuals are more likely to exercise (walk) with a dog, as they feel more motivated, welcome the social support, and may even feel safer. In fact, dog ownership conferred increased physical activity up to 400% more than for non-dog owners.

So what does this mean for Pet Partners? We all know that our companion animals working as therapy animals aren’t just doing good in our communities. In addition to all the positive benefits we get from them, they are probably encouraging us to walk more. And it’s not only dogs! Registered handler Cynthia Wagner shared this: “My miniature horse, Dakota, is rather hefty, so the joke was that we would both go on a diet and walk to lose weight. We walked about 3–4 days a week, at least a mile or two (or three). I was able to lose 25 pounds with walking and diet. Dakota lost weight as well, though it is harder to tell in the winter months when he is big and bushy!”

Walk With Me is just one more way we can share our amazing therapy animals and have a positive impact on human health and well-being. Having the opportunity to walk with a therapy animal might be just the motivation some people need to start them on a path to better fitness. If you haven’t started Walk With Me yet, what are you waiting for?
The University of Missouri Research Center for Human-Animal Interaction (ReCHAI) has conducted research on dog walking since it was founded in 2005. Our results consistently indicate that dogs—even when not a person’s own pet—can be a strong motivator for walking. Walk a Hound, Lose a Pound (WAHLAP) was designed to benefit both the people and the dogs in our community. People from the community walked dogs from the local humane society on Saturday mornings from April to October. People were matched with dogs based on their preferences. For example, those who wanted a leisurely stroll on the tree-lined nature trail were matched with an older or smaller dog, while those who wanted a brisk walk or run were matched with larger or more high-energy dogs. The program was free and open to the public. There was also an option to enroll in a study of physical activity. The aim of the study was to measure whether participating in WAHLAP was associated with a slight decrease in weight and a significant increase in motivation to participate in physical activity.

While WAHLAP was open to all, it might not have been accessible for everyone. This is why we conducted the WAHLAP Seniors and Walking for Healthy Hearts projects. WAHLAP Seniors studied physical activity motivation among older adults residing at assisted living facilities. Participants were assigned to either walk with a friendly shelter dog, walk with a friendly human companion, or do their usual activities in a no-treatment control group. Interestingly, the human companion walking group sometimes discouraged each other from walking, citing either weather or personal reasons to skip the walk. However, the shelter dog became a motivator to engage in the walk. People in this group reported that they built a bond with the dog and increased confidence in their own balance and walking. The bond with a dog was also found to be a strong motivator in the Walking for Healthy Hearts program. Walking for Healthy Hearts paired overweight, sedentary public housing residents with a registered dog and handler team. The participants reported that the dogs made walking pleasant and they built a genuine loving relationship with the dog. People who took part in the 50-week walking group lost a significant amount of weight (14 pounds), surpassing that of national weight loss programs. Many stated they participated every day because the dog needed the walks. This finding illustrates that the needs of a dog—even one that is not our own pet—can motivate us in unique ways. We are often more likely to engage in a physical activity such as walking when we are doing it to provide for someone we care about. We and our friends can come up with many reasons why we don’t want to go for a walk, but a dog needs to be walked each day and rarely refuses an offer to go out on a leash.

Most recently, ReCHAI conducted a study using a large nationally representative sample of adults over age 50. The aim of the study was to investigate the relationships between dog ownership, the bond with a pet, and older adults’ physical activity and health. Dog walking was associated with more physical activity, better physical health, and fewer doctor visits. What was even more remarkable was the impact of the bond. People with a higher pet bond were more likely to walk their dog and spend more time walking with their dog.

ReCHAI’s community programs and research studies have found that a dog does not have to be a person’s pet to provide a motivator for physical activity. In caring for a dog, we often end up caring for ourselves.

Jessica Bibbo, PhD, & Rebecca Johnson, PhD, RN, FAAN, FNAP
Pet Partners teams from across the country are taking part in an exciting Workplace Well-being initiative with Aetna. The reaction to this innovative program has been very positive. In 2016 Aetna and Pet Partners launched the pilot program at several Aetna offices to have therapy animal teams visit with employees.

“We were eager to collaborate with Aetna to explore the addition of organized therapy animal visits as a unique component of a comprehensive employee well-being and benefits program,” explained Annie Peters, Pet Partners President & CEO. “The positive feedback from Aetna associates has been tremendous!” After each visit, Aetna employees complete a detailed survey to capture their reactions. A majority of employees who have participated in the program have reported that they feel more productive and less stressed after the visits. They also report that they feel their mood is improved.

Pet Partners teams are now visiting at over a dozen Aetna locations across the country including Connecticut, Texas, Arizona, Nebraska, Illinois, and California, to name just a few. The visits typically take place for one to two hours, often coinciding with the lunch hour, when associates are likely to have a break in their busy schedules.

Diane Lopes, an Aetna associate in Connecticut, provided direct evidence for the value of the visits: “I’ve been monitoring my blood pressure at the Wellness Center per my doctor’s request. Today on my walk down to the Wellness Center, I passed the auditorium and saw that it was Pet Partners day. What a great way to spend a few relaxing minutes before getting my blood pressure taken. And my pressure was great! Lower than normal. Kudos to the Pet Partners program!”

“The employees are not the only ones raving about the visits,” reports Traci Pryor, Senior Director of National Strategic Partnerships at Pet Partners. “I had to laugh when one handler told us that her dog’s tail starts quickly wagging the second they pull into the Aetna parking garage because he knows he is about to get a two-hour massage!”

Kay Mooney, Vice President, Employee Benefits & Well-Being at Aetna, delivered a keynote address at last fall’s Professionalizing the Passion conference in Bellevue, Washington. The session, titled “Aetna’s Journey to a Healthier, Happier Workforce,” described Aetna’s progress toward incorporating animal-assisted interventions into the workplace and highlighted our shared belief that animals and humans share an incredible connection. “We have seen firsthand how therapy animals truly improve lives and lower stress,” said Mooney.
Animal-Assisted Workplace Well-being with Pet Partners

In 2016, Pet Partners began a partnership with Aetna to bring therapy animals into the workplace to promote employee stress reduction, satisfaction, and engagement. Since then, the concept has grown increasingly popular and expanded beyond Aetna to other fields and industries, and Pet Partners is now working with many organizations on animal-assisted workplace well-being (AAWW) visits.

**Is this considered AAI?**

Absolutely. Workplace well-being visits are animal-assisted activities. It may feel different because teams are not working with a vulnerable population, but that doesn’t mean they aren’t making a difference. For example, Pet Partners teams have visited a company in Texas where employees review online content for potential animal cruelty. Can you imagine how stressful that job would be? For these employees, the opportunity to spend some time with wonderful Pet Partners teams helped reduce some of the stress they experience as part of their jobs, and reminded them that what they are doing is important.

**What are employees saying about office visits from Pet Partners teams?**

“I can’t adequately explain how much I loved this! This completely made my day better.” “I would like to let you know that I had a very good experience with the therapy dogs. I am a big animal lover and I knew it would be a relaxing experience for me. But it was much more than that! I saw people that were shy, but still felt good and came more than once to have that moment of tenderness. Wonderful experience!”

“I look forward to it all week when I know Pet Partners will be here. The dogs and owners are very sweet and calming, and it is nice to talk with fellow employees that you wouldn’t meet otherwise.”

**Is there research that supports this kind of visit?**

Yes! When Pet Partners therapy animal teams make workplace well-being visits, they boost employee morale and satisfaction, and increase productivity. Numerous studies have shown that when people take just a few moments to pet an animal their stress is reduced. Research also shows that animals in the workplace often lead to more productive coworker interaction, increased trust levels between colleagues, and more effective collaboration.

Sometimes companies survey employees after they have spent time visiting with Pet Partners teams. Aetna employees have reported significant improvements following these visits:

- 99% of employees felt their mood had improved; including 45% who stated their mood significantly improved.
- 99% of employees felt more productive; including 55% who felt significantly more productive.

There are also studies showing that employees who can bring their dogs to work report a lower perceived level of stress. However, many organizations are not yet ready to allow all their employees to bring pets to the office. This is where therapy animals are becoming an area of interest. Therapy animals can visit for a time-limited period and arrive with a guaranteed level of training and assessment. Organizations that are invested in maintaining the health and happiness of their employees are exploring incorporating visits by therapy animals as an employee benefit.

**Are these companies supporting Pet Partners in return?**

Corporate organizations interested in having Pet Partners help coordinate their visits can make a donation to Pet Partners through our Sponsored Visit Program. The Sponsored Visit Program provides companies and organizations a unique opportunity to financially support our mission. When companies generously support Pet Partners through our Sponsored Visit Program, they are supporting thousands of therapy animal teams as they positively impact millions of lives across the country. These partnerships help Pet Partners remain the leader in the field, and the financial support allows us to provide additional education, such as the 2017 Professionalizing the Passion conference, online courses, and webinars.

**If you’re a registered handler…**

Animal-assisted workplace well-being visits are often coordinated directly through Pet Partners. When we have a visit opportunity, we’ll directly email teams in the visit area inviting you to participate. (Tip: Be sure your email preferences are set to receive volunteer opportunity emails. You can do this in the Volunteer Center.)

You’ll be interacting with employees who have chosen to come visit with you to destress. How visits are set up varies, but typically you can anticipate that there might be several employees present, so animals should be comfortable in mid-sized crowds.

Depending on team availability, there might be multiple Pet Partners teams present. If you wish to participate, your animal should be comfortable visiting with other animals in the vicinity.

As with any visit, there may be restrictions on species based on requirements of the visit site. We try to tailor our announcements of these opportunities based on the information we’re given by the requesting organization.

We hope you’ll join us for a future animal-assisted workplace well-being event!
You won’t find an argument against walking. Walking is the foundation for many exercises, one of the simplest ways to stay active, and has proven health benefits, such as increased cardiovascular fitness, reduced risk of heart disease and stroke, stronger bones, and increased muscle strength. Everyone, from your friends, to your doctor, to the U.S. Surgeon General, recommends walking! In fact, the Surgeon General recently called on the nation to Step It Up!—a program to promote walking and walkable communities. However, the problem lies in motivating people to get outside and start walking.

Pet Partners recently unleashed a secret motivator, and you may be able to guess what it is: therapy animals!

In response to the Surgeon General’s call to action, Pet Partners created a special initiative called Walk With Me™. Therapy dogs, as well as other therapy animals including mini horses and llamas, are now able to visit independent living centers, rehabilitation institutes, and other places to accompany people on walks. Whether it’s around the block or at a nearby park, these people will benefit from companionship and exercise.

“There’s no doubt about the cardiovascular improvements associated with walking, but there are also advantages to mental well-being,” said Dr. David Williams, Pet Partners Chief Medical Officer. “Getting the chance to walk with animals may be a stimulus to get out, get some fresh air, and socialize.”

A significant percentage of people who stay in places like independent living centers and rehabilitation institutes may suffer from loneliness. The Walk With Me initiative aims to combat that by encouraging time in the fresh air and sunshine, socialization with the handlers, and interaction with the therapy animals.

Now, let’s talk about the therapy dogs. Although they are a major part of the positive human experience, they reap many benefits from walking as well!

About half of all dogs are overweight—walking and exercising (along with dietary changes) are a great method for dogs to stay in shape! Plus, the walks aren’t usually very long, so older dogs can participate, too.

Offering treats, such as Vita Bone® Artisan Inspired® biscuits, can be a wonderful opportunity to support the human-animal bond. People love giving dogs treats, of course!

It’s not work if you love it, and this rings true for therapy dogs, who are technically on the job when they sport their Pet Partners vests. The Walk With Me initiative is definitely the crossroads of business and pleasure for pups, where keeping you company meets grass-sniffing and squirrel-eyeing! Dr. Williams even mentioned that as much as his goldendoodle likes spending time with clients at a hospital or other facility, he and the dog also love the opportunity to get outdoors and go for a walk.

Walk With Me is healthful, fun, and advantageous for clients—but it’s also extremely valuable for our four-legged friends.
Pet Partners Advocacy: Another Way to Make a Difference

Pet Partners launched our advocacy initiative in 2017, and thanks to your enthusiasm, we’ve hit the ground running! If you haven’t registered yet, don’t miss out. Sign up today at petpartners.org/advocacy/

Looking back at 2017

• September: The advocacy initiative launches at the Pet Partners Professionalizing the Passion conference.
• October: Pet Partners participates in Pet Night on Capitol Hill.

• December: Over 1,400 advocate signatures submitted to Rep. Phil Roe urging a committee vote on the Puppies Assisting Wounded Service members Act.

Looking for ways to get involved?

• Organizing support for the Pet and Women Safety Act.

What to expect in 2018

• Launch of our state advocacy efforts.
• Exclusive webinars on how bills really become laws, how to effectively communicate with legislators, and outcomes from the 2018 midterm election.
• A Walk With Me™ event on Capitol Hill in the spring.
• Send a letter to Congress in support of the Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers Act to help veterans with severe PTSD get connected with a service animal.
• Urge Congress to pass the Pet and Women Safety Act to protect the human-animal bond from domestic violence

Pet Partners provides the tools to help you get involved! Go to petpartners.org/advocacy/ to take action and learn more.

Can you do more? Become an evaluator

Are you a handler with 18 months of volunteer experience? If so, you are eligible to apply and may already have the basic aptitude to successfully evaluate other teams.

Can you give a few days more a year to make it possible for more volunteers to share their wonderful companion animals with their communities?

Pet Partners team evaluators play a critical role in growing and sustaining therapy animal visits in their communities.

We have designed accessible, innovative, and supportive course-work that will prepare you to take on this role.

If you’re ready to be a volunteer leader, please contact Jesse Haas at jesseh@petpartners.org
There's a lot to be concerned about when you're running a hospital. This is what Pet Partners handler Jan Nowicki learned after the facility administration department at the hospital where she and fellow Therapy Animal Program volunteers had been visiting introduced some policy changes. Handlers were told that as hospital volunteers, they would have to park in employee parking—the furthest corner of the campus—and were not allowed to have the animals on the campus shuttles. Jan was concerned that it would be impossible to keep the animals clean and dry in inclement weather or cool in extreme heat while walking across a very large blacktop and cement parking lot.

Believing YAYABA™—You Are Your Animal’s Best Advocate—as well as being concerned about hygiene and client safety, Jan reached out to Pet Partners HQ for guidance and support. We were happy to help her with some strategies to make her case to the hospital.

Jan secured a meeting with key hospital personnel and presented Pet Partners Policies and Procedures, the Code of Ethics, insurance information, and two Interactions articles on therapy animals in hospitals and handlers advocating for their animals. (Her partner, Ruby, attended as well, and Jan was quick to point out that having Ruby along also made a winning impression.)

The outcome? The hospital now allows the teams to park closer to the doors while respecting the needs of patients and visitors, provides special placards for car windshields, and allows the handlers to use valet services. An unexpected result? The therapy animals now have their own volunteer ID badges. While patients find the badges “neat” or “cute,” the badges also serve a higher purpose. Hospital staff can easily identify that the animals are authorized to be in the facility, and it eliminates a lot of stress and minimizes interruptions for the handlers.

For the dedicated handlers who visit at this facility, they stay very busy. The number of visits made at the hospital more than doubled in 2017 over 2016. They visit in many departments, including Oncology and Palliative Care, and participate in animal-assisted therapy in both the adult and pediatric rehabilitation programs. The teams are also a welcome presence at major hospital events.

Jan shared a few thoughts about this outcome with Pet Partners HQ:

“I’m pleased to inform you that, through a difficult situation, we now have better relations with the facility than ever before in the three years we’ve been visiting there. I’ll continue to share articles from Interactions with the staff, like the one by Dr. Williams in the Fall 2017 issue. Thanks again for your superior training and support. I wouldn’t want to work through a situation like this without Pet Partners’ backing and support.”

Facing a similar situation and would like to strategize with a Pet Partners staff member? Get in touch with us at petpartners.org/about-us/contact-us/
Official National Therapy Animal Day Shirts Now Available!

April 30 is National Therapy Animal Day!

Brand new Pet Partners shirts and sweatshirts are now available for order. Join us in celebrating National Therapy Animal Day with our latest designs! All proceeds benefit Pet Partners. Shirts come in a variety of colors, styles, and sizes. Act now because they’re only available for a limited time! Visit petpartners.org to order yours today.

Celebrate Treats & Sweets Day this April

Treats & Sweets Day is the yummiest way to celebrate and support therapy animals.

Sign up today at treatsandsweetsday.org. Simply bake up some tasty treats (both pet and human treats are encouraged!) and then invite your family, friends, and colleagues to enjoy your homemade goodies in exchange for a donation to Pet Partners. You could hold a Treats & Sweets Day party at your home, your workplace, or even a facility where you visit. Select anytime in April that works for you! We make it simple by providing tons of ideas and tools, as well as support to help you set up your personal fundraising page (your online “bakery”) at treatsandsweetsday.org.

Join us for Treats & Sweets Day and bring pets and people together in the sweetest way!

Congratulations and thank you to Evan

A Top Treats & Sweets Day Fundraiser

Evan has raised over $5000 for Pet Partners by baking treats and collecting online donations from friends and family. “I decided to participate in Treats & Sweets because baking has always been a big passion of mine. My cousin who has cancer is comforted by the love of dogs when he isn’t feeling well so I wanted to honor him by raising money for Pet Partners and baking homemade dog treats to donate to my local hospital, which has a therapy animal program supported by Pet Partners.”

Congratulations and thank you to Evan

A Top Treats & Sweets Day Fundraiser
Tax Reform presents giving opportunities

The tax reform that took effect on 1/1/2018 has brought questions, not only for individuals but also for nonprofits; how will these changes impact charitable organizations such as Pet Partners? Thankfully, we anticipate that donations to support our dedicated therapy animal teams will continue, proving once again that Americans are philanthropic, regardless of tax changes.

Many are still perplexed about how their personal situations will be affected by the recent tax reform. Although it is suggested that individuals contact their financial advisors for specific questions, here are three favorable opportunities to support a nonprofit such as Pet Partners in 2018.

**Gifts of Appreciated Stock:**
For many, the value of stocks that individuals own has increased. It can be advantageous to donate shares of stock that have been owned for at least one year. Transferring stock which has gained in value to Pet Partners will help avoid capital gains taxes you would have incurred if you had sold it outright. It is simple to transfer, and you are helping further the mission of Pet Partners.

**IRA Charitable Rollover:**
No changes were made to this act that allows individuals age 70-½ and over to transfer up to $100,000 of their required minimum distribution (RMD) to a charity. These gifts are excluded from your gross income and count toward RMD.

**Donor Advised Fund (DAF):**
Taxpayers may consider establishing a DAF, which are gaining in popularity. If you will no longer be itemizing your deductions post-tax reform, consider “lumping” your charitable gifts in one year and contribute that amount into a DAF to get the benefit of an itemized deduction for your charitable gift. Then when your DAF makes grants to Pet Partners in the years you take the standard deduction, the grant money used is money that already enjoyed a tax deduction when you contributed it in the previous year you itemized.

We appreciate our many supporters who make donating a priority, regardless of tax implications. For additional questions, please email maryb@petpartners.org.

Carol and Melanie the Therapy Cat Continue to Make a Difference

Carol knew her cat, Melanie, was special. She was easygoing and loved being around people, so Carol decided to share Melanie's comfort and love with others by registering as a Pet Partners therapy animal team. Carol was right—Melanie was a natural! They visited at memory care and assisted living facilities, making a difference in the lives of so many. If a resident was upset or sad, Melanie would give them special attention to brighten their mood.

In 2015, Carol noticed that Melanie was getting older, so she knew it was time for them to retire as a therapy animal team. Carol then learned about the new advocacy program, which allowed her to stay involved with the Pet Partners mission. When she saw the PAWS Action alert, Carol signed it, thinking “If Melanie can make people feel better with just one visit, imagine what a service dog could mean to veterans with PTSD? They should have the right to a service animal.”

Carol then became a monthly donor to make an even bigger impact. “I am proud of being affiliated with Pet Partners,” Carol said, particularly noting Pet Partners’ commitment to education and high standards. Carol, a big believer in the human-animal bond, knew her monthly gift would support the advancement of Pet Partners.

Becoming a monthly donor like Carol is easy. Just go to petpartners.org/donate or call 425-679-5503 to set up your monthly gift. If you’re interested in joining our efforts to advocate for the human-animal bond, please go to petpartners.org/advocacy/

There are so many ways to further the Pet Partners mission. Please join us today!
Why does Pet Partners prohibit therapy animals from wearing costumes during visits? It’s so cute to see an animal dressed up!

Our policy regarding therapy animals and costumes is based in our focus on safety. We want to make sure all therapy animals visits are safe and effective. Use of costumes can increase risks and make visits less safe.

One of the concerns about costumes is increasing the possibility of injury and infection. Costume items often include elements that could scratch or poke a client and break the skin. Costumes can also catch on equipment or clients’ clothing, which could bring a risk of injury for the client or the animal.

In addition, costumes can be difficult to disinfect, which increases the risk of transmitting infection. Our protocols for infection control, which meet the guidelines for therapy animal visits issued by SHEA, mean that costumes present an undesirable risk.

Another concern about costumes during visits is that they could cause confusion for some clients. For example, clients with dementia might not understand that a dog with devil horns is wearing a costume, or be unsure about what species a cat is if it’s wearing rabbit ears or antlers. This confusion might lead to a client experiencing distress. Therapy animal visits should always be beneficial for those being visited, so any element that could bring confusion or distress should be avoided.

Note that Pet Partners defines “costume” as any item or technique intended to make an animal appear as something other than what it is. The policy against costumes excludes not only full outfits and items such as headbands and ties, but also prohibits dyeing an animal’s hair or feathers. Seasonal bandanas, however, are welcome.

In an ideal visit, the presence of a therapy animal will bring smiles—we’re definitely in favor of that! At the same time, animal-assisted interventions come with responsibilities to the clients that we must always keep in mind. We want the happiness and comfort our teams bring to be supported by a foundation of safety and attention to these responsibilities. The friendliness of a therapy dog, the novelty of visiting with a therapy mini horse, or the comforting presence of a therapy rabbit will bring plenty of smiles all on their own. This is what our Therapy Animal Program truly brings to clients—no costumes needed.

For further information about the policy on costumes, registered handlers can consult the Costumes FAQ in the Resource Library as well as the Pet Partners Handler Guide.

I’ve seen some references recently to professionals such as doctors or teachers using their Pet Partners–registered therapy animals in their jobs. Pet Partners policy states that we must be volunteers. Are people using their therapy animals at work in violation of this policy?

You’re right that Pet Partners teams must be working as volunteers, without payment, in order to be covered under Pet Partners’ general commercial liability insurance. Our teams donate their time to share the effects of the human-animal bond with people who can benefit, and we’re so grateful to our handlers and their pets for their generosity and effort.

Do you have a question on a topic that would be of interest to a broad audience? Send it for consideration to editor@petpartners.org. If you need an immediate response, please contact Pet Partners through the Contact Us form at www.petpartners.org
SAVE THE DATE!

Saturday, September 29, 2018
World’s Largest Pet Walk
An official Pet Partners walking event

In celebration of our Walk With Me™ initiative, Pet Partners is excited to announce our World’s Largest Pet Walk!

How will it work?
You and your pet(s) can walk at any time on Saturday, September 29, 2018. Walk whatever distance feels right for you and your animal, and choose any location! Whether you lead a Walk With Me event in your community, gather some friends and family for a casual stroll around the block, or take a quiet hike that’s just you and your animal, we want to see our Pet Partners community taking steps with their pets.

It’s so simple to take part!
There’s no fee or registration required to participate, but we do ask that you share your photos with us and spread the word on social media. An official walking bib will be available for you to print at home, and commemorative event shirts will go on sale this summer. Please visit petpartners.org later this year for details, and look for more information in email and social media. Join us and demonstrate the benefits of walking with pets!

#WorldsLargestPetWalk2018 • #PetPartners